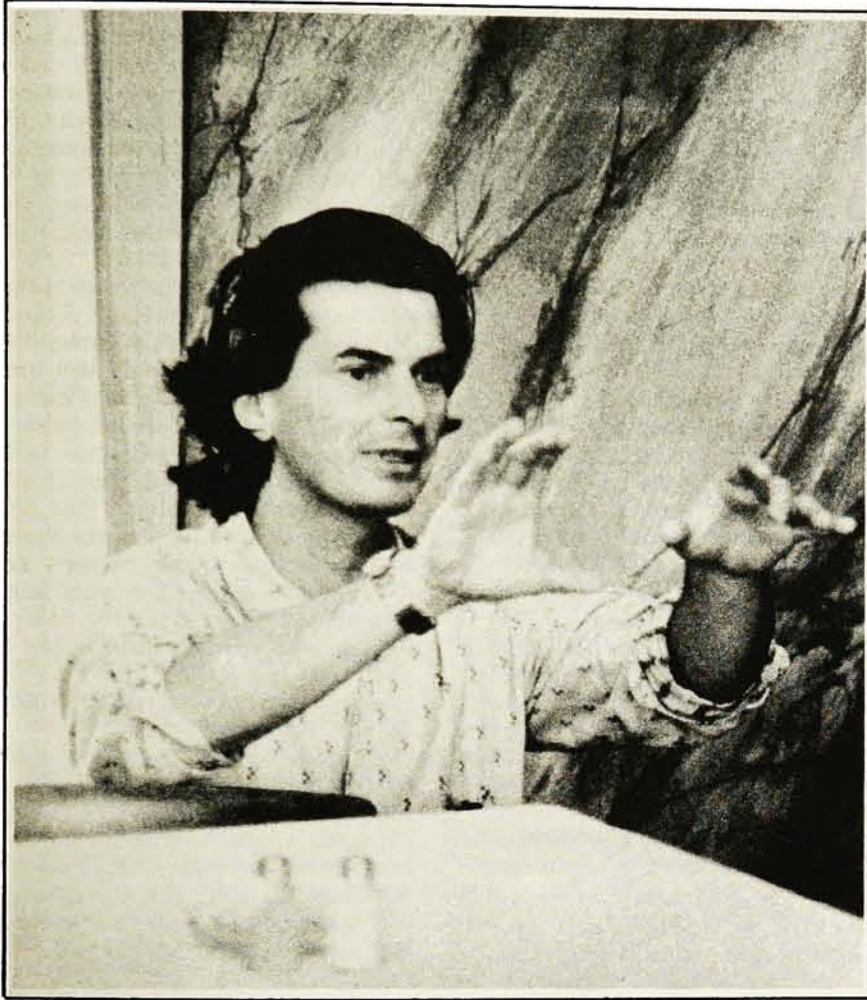


# Howls from the Asphalt Jungle



A month ago I had trouble finding any information on Jean-Claude Lauzon. This month his first feature, Les Productions Oz' *Un Zoo, la nuit*, will open the Directors' Fortnight at the International Film Festival at Cannes. Soon, you won't have to look him up. The short, passionate, long-haired man who speaks so intensely will be famous.

In 1979 *Super-maire, l'homme de trois milliards*, a film he made while a student at UQAM (Université du Québec à Montréal), won him the Grand Prix Norman McLaren for best Canadian Student film. In 1980 his screenplay for *Piwi* won a contest organized by l'Institut québécois du cinéma and la Société Radio- Télévision du Québec – the prize was \$70,000 to turn the script into a film.

For the first 27 minutes *Piwi* is a tender, almost lyrical film about a mentally retarded man whom no one ever loved and who finds refuge in a trunkful of memories of his youth and his father. The last two minutes, however, shocked people and the film caused a furore. It also won several prizes for Lauzon. *Un Zoo, la Nuit* is his first film since then.

by José Arroyo

**Cinema Canada:** When you won the Radio-Québec Prize in 1981, other winners were Pierre Falardeau, Yves Simoneau and Jacques Mety. All of these people continued directing films and programs for TV while you went into directing commercials. *Un Zoo, la nuit* is your first feature film, right?

**Jean-Claude Lauzon:** It's not because I haven't wanted to make films. After *Piwi*, I wrote *Un Zoo, la nuit* – immediately, immediately afterwards. I've had that screenplay written for four years. It's taken that much time before the script got accepted.

After *Piwi*, I was offered another short called *Monsieur l'aviateur*. Before I started shooting *Un Zoo*, they also offered me a feature film, *Les Portes tournantes*, and they offered me another one while I was working on my film. But when you start making *auteur* films like *Piwi*, it's hard to choose the next film because it also becomes a choice of what you want to say. The director side of me really wanted to make a movie. But the *auteur* side of me didn't want to say those things.

Instead, I wrote my own script and took it to all the production houses. At the time, all the film projects had to be tied to television. And when people read the script for *Un Zoo, la nuit* they would automatically say that it couldn't

be shown on TV. Therefore, it didn't interest anyone. They weren't looking for films – they were looking for projects that were eligible for as many grants as possible. For four years I didn't get anything but negative criticism on the script and almost everyone turned down *Un Zoo, la nuit*. But it's not because I chose not to shoot.

**Cinema Canada:** In an interview with Nathalie Petrowski in *Le Devoir* a couple of years ago you said, "I don't want the Québécois to pay the cost of my inexperience." What did you mean?

**Jean-Claude Lauzon:** At the time, doing commercials was very badly looked at. It was a time when all filmmakers passed through the National Film Board to make a movie. You had a B.A. in Religion or Literature and they called you to make a movie. We used to invent filmmakers. Some were people who had never even seen a movie being made. But Quebec and Canada absolutely needed a film culture and they hired everybody. Today, it's much more difficult to learn your craft.

Look at who the young filmmakers are. You have to fight like dogs. You have to fight all the time. And to learn your craft, to play with a 35mm camera, you have to shoot, you have to shoot a lot. I directed commercials. I'm very glad I did them. And I'll continue making them.

**Cinema Canada:** What you're telling me is that you had a choice of working on other people's films or working on commercials and you chose commercials?

**Jean-Claude Lauzon:** Yes. Yes. In commercials I don't say anything personally.

**Cinema Canada:** So you prefer learning the technique without lending your voice to something you didn't want to say?

**Jean-Claude Lauzon:** Yeah. You have to understand what happened with *Piwi*. Though it was totally refused at the Genies, it did have a really good reputation here. But there was this guy Cohen who was an MP from Notre-Dame de Grâce. There were big debates in Parliament and he was saying that *Piwi* was too violent, sexually violent. That it shouldn't have been funded by the government. It was as if I had done a blue movie.

**Cinema Canada:** How did you feel about this furore? Do you think it hurt your chances of getting work?

**Jean-Claude Lauzon:** I found it funny, but it did hurt me. My mother called me one morning and said, "Do you believe they're going to put you in jail?" My mother was so worried. I said, "Why?" "They say in *La Presse* that your movie was too dirty." "What are you talking about?" I said. Then I read the paper and it was a real joke.

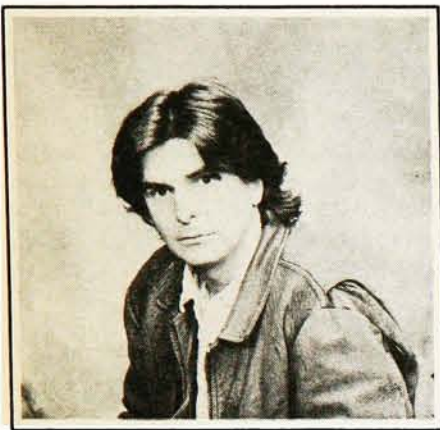
**Cinema Canada:** I've heard *Un Zoo, la nuit* centers on a father/son relationship. That's also very much at the core of *Piwi*, I think.

**Jean-Claude Lauzon:** You're not going to believe me. After I wrote the script, I was with Denys Arcand who helped me a lot on *Un Zoo, la nuit*. He started reading my script a long time ago, before he was really Denys Arcand with all this success and stuff like that. A funny thing – one day I was talking to him on the phone. I didn't really know him. He didn't really know me. I said, "I want you to read my script." And he said, "O.K., we should meet somewhere." And I said, "O.K." And he said, "Well how am I going to know you. You know I don't really know your face." "Don't worry, I'm going to have a pan with two fried eggs in it." And I went to see him carrying a pan with two fried eggs in it. Since then we are good friends.

After he saw *Piwi* he said, "It's funny you're still talking about father/son relationships. And it's true, I really didn't know that. The writing was done and everything. He was the first guy to tell me.

**Cinema Canada:** Describe *Un Zoo, la nuit*. What is it about and what did you try to do?

**Jean-Claude Lauzon:** If I did refuse until now to give interviews, it's because I do believe that a director



shouldn't explain a movie. People should look at it.

**Cinema Canada:** *I'm not asking you to explain it. There's a difference between describing and explaining.*

**Jean-Claude Lauzon:** It's an urban film. I tried to do a film with a high contrast. When I was younger, I was really impressed with *Les Bons débarras* – that kind of film. But I'm from another generation and my preoccupations are totally different. I was influenced by some German films and some American films which were talking about really urban life. I was myself spending a lot of time in the evening and staying up really late in some funny places with really funny people.

I was born to a really poor father. About once every three months I would go see him. And in speaking with him, I would find how I had changed. I was coming back a little bit stupid. I may drive a big motorcycle, have leather coat, go out really late in the evening and have a really funny life but... I was undergoing a transformation and our relationship was undergoing a transformation. I couldn't really talk to him.

I left home really early. I also had a chance to go to university. You get to the point where you win prizes and go to do workshops at the American Film Institute in Los Angeles and you lose your preoccupation with your poor, poor, poor father. You don't fucking care anymore. You want to be modern.

I started to write this high contrast movie because I was hanging out with other artists in weird places where people were dealing dope all the time – my night life – and then having a really strange day life.

What I didn't like about urban films like *Diva* or *Subway* is that all the characters are totally empty. I was looking for stronger characters. *Un Zoo, la nuit* is really the kitchen of *Piwi* and *Les Bons débarras* mixed in with, I don't know, Fassbinder's *Querelle*.

Even if I want to do another kind of cinema. Even if, in the long term, the kind of cinema that interests me is different. I can't deny that which Québécois cinematic culture has given me. However, I do think I belong to a generation of young filmmakers with totally different preoccupations than the previous generations.

For instance, I think Gilles Carle is a great filmmaker. I think Quebec has produced many great filmmakers. But I also think there have been many films which lacked discipline vis-à-vis the



medium. With regard to telling a story, with regard to controlling a shoot.

Today, it's much harder to make a film. You have to be better. You have to have better technique. It's no more a community trip. Directing a film is a craft and you have to learn your craft. The crews are now more competent because of all the experience they've gained shooting with the Americans and they're also more and more demanding. A crew will give you a lot if you can be efficient.

The previous generation were really interested in saying something. I spend as much time asking myself how. I'm concerned with editing, mixing, lighting, preparing the shoot... as much as with what I'm saying.

**Cinema Canada:** *You've said Scorsese, Coppola and Wenders have had an influence on you. And now you're talking about people like Gilles Carle. How do you bring those two kinds of films together? What kind of an effect did they have on you as a Québécois filmmaker?*

**Jean-Claude Lauzon:** I would say that 10 years ago or maybe 15 years ago there was another generation of young filmmakers who were really impressed by Denys Arcand, by Michel Brault and all the masters. The people they respected were local, and they tried to duplicate what they saw in local films. I myself was really touched by Forcier's *Night Cap* but at the same time I was looking at Woody Allen's films and many other kinds of films. In *Un Zoo*, I didn't put in a single reference from a Québécois film. I want to make films for the world. I have a lot of respect for Gilles Carle and I believe he's a great director. I have lots of respect for Denys Arcand, and particularly for Marc-André Forcier. But I am also very different.

**Cinema Canada:** *But at the same time, Piwi is a distinctly Québécois film. It couldn't have been made anywhere else.*

**Jean-Claude Lauzon:** Not, that's not true. *Piwi* was written and was supposed to be made at the American Film Institute. You're looking at *Piwi* only in one way. But just think of *Piwi* with a Mexican boy working in L.A.

**Cinema Canada:** *Maybe the story is universal but the specifics of it are very*



*Québécois: the music, the dépanneur, the way people talk. And there's a whole bunch of cultural references that you can't say are from anywhere else.*

**Jean-Claude Lauzon:** That's true, but I don't try to be from anywhere else. I am French Canadian. Even if I made films in Italy or in the United States, my memory would remain French Canadian. But certainly *Un Zoo, la nuit* is much less regional or local than *Piwi*.

**Cinema Canada:** *How so?*

**Jean-Claude Lauzon:** The Poignard character, who's the lead, could be a character in no matter what very urban film. He could be German. He could be French. But I'm sure there are specifics. What I know is all from a Québécois point of view. But *Un Zoo, la nuit* is going to be easier for foreigners to understand than other Québécois films.

In *Un Zoo, la nuit*, for example, the son ends up making a deal with the father to go hunting. But the hunt becomes only an ancestral tradition that takes into account two lifestyles that are very different. If he would have been Spanish he would have gone with his father to a *corrida*.

**Cinema Canada:** *How did you choose your actors? Where do you find them, how do you find them? Do you test in video first? What is the process?*

**Jean-Claude Lauzon:** Yes, particularly for *Zoo*, we worked a lot on video. Before anything, the choice of Roger Lebel and Carbon 14... the contrast that there could be in those two styles.

**Cinema Canada:** *What is Carbon 14?*

**Jean-Claude Lauzon:** Carbon 14 is the most avant-garde theatre group here. It has an international reputation.

**Cinema Canada:** *Be a bit more specific.*

**Jean-Claude Lauzon:** O.K. They did a piece called *Le Rail* which in my opinion demanded an integrity which Carbon 14 has always demanded. There is no one in Carbon 14 who does any commercials. They are not members of the *Union des artistes* (the actors union). They do a theatre which is very hard. Very violent. And the actors take enormous risks. Really a lot of risks. Where the actors must, aside from the quality of the interpretation, they must be in extraordinary physical shape. Carbon 14 is also a troupe which unites people from completely different cultures. People from Toronto, anglophones, francophones – there's a high

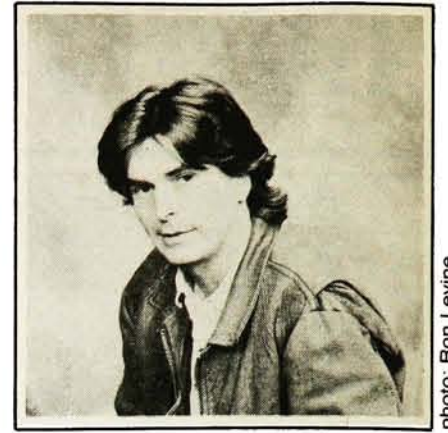


photo: Ron Levine

contrast which gives the troupe a completely international tone.

I used three actors from Carbon 14 – Gilles Maheu, Jerry Snell and Lorne Grass. The mere choice of them and Roger Lebel, the contrast between them, expressed for me the tone of the film. Roger Lebel with his side of "bonhomme sympathique" (Mr. Nice Guy) mixed up with the avant-garde underground. By the way, I'm very, very happy to have worked with Roger Lebel.

I just want you to expand a little bit because most people who read this probably won't know very much about Québécois theatre.

Well, I don't want to become a professor either. If people don't know, I don't give a damn. Carbon 14 can't be explained, it must be seen. Like my film, I hope it will be seen. What you're telling me is funny. It's like if in making a film you had to explain everything so that everyone could understand, you'd never finish.

**Cinema Canada:** *But as a bottom line what you want to do is communicate. Right?*

**Jean-Claude Lauzon:** You want to push out some energy that you have to live with. It's two really different things to be a director and a writer and to make an *auteur* film. The director side of me just wants to be on a set but there's a guy behind who wants to say something.

**Cinema Canada:** *But you want to say something to someone. Right? You do want someone to understand what you're saying.*

**Jean-Claude Lauzon:** Yeah, you hope there is somebody somewhere but you don't work like that. I don't work like that. I just push that in the air and hope that it's going to drop on somebody. It's funny, I believe there is more energy to push out something than to hope there is someone who will receive it. Even if I was in the desert, I would spend my time screaming, you understand? And it's not because I hope that someone at the other end will hear me.

**Cinema Canada:** *So during the last five years you must have been very frustrated.*

**Jean-Claude Lauzon:** It was very, very difficult. Yes.

**Cinema Canada:** *When you won the award for Best Canadian Student Film at Concordia University, in accepting*

the award you said, "Thank you because thanks to this award, Jean-Claude Lord is giving me a traineeship." Lord was a member of the jury that year and that was the first I heard of it. But you got what you wanted. You were very driven.

**Jean-Claude Lauzon:** It's true. And I'm still very driven.

**Cinema Canada:** So if you were so driven and so blocked...

**Jean-Claude Lauzon:** But you have to understand what was going on. At the time everyone was looking for Bambi movies. My film is not *Bambi*. One of the most fantastic things that happened to me – the luckiest thing to have happened to me in the last couple of years – was to meet Roger Frappier and Pierre Gendron. Really. Meeting them was the most because they saw movies other than at Radio-Canada TV. They saw movies. They like movies. They want to make films. They read the script and said they wanted to do it. I said, "You're not scared" and they said, "Why should we be?"

I really do believe a lot of great auteurs can be born in Quebec and Canada. But Quebec and Canada are really puritan. It's unbelievable.

You can explain most of the films made in the last couple of years by looking at who has the power to get films made rather than at what artists wanted to say. If you see how the films are produced, you will understand what we are

allowed to say in Canada. There's a lot of censorship in Canada. They don't tell you "change that" or "we don't accept this." That's not what happens. They take you out to dinner and explain how films are made in this country. And they say, "You do understand – if we put money in this kind of film we will get too many telephone calls from this kind of people. You do understand, I hope." I was very, very lucky to have found the right producers. And that's important.

**Cinema Canada:** I think in the rest of Canada Quebec is seen as very decadent and corrupt in terms of its morality.

**Jean-Claude Lauzon:** I'm pleased about that. I hope *Un Zoo* is going to hit so hard in this way.

**Cinema Canada:** I think you are part of the first generation of Québécois directors who have an audience for your films. In the late '70s, *Les Bons débaras* was considered an enormous success and it ran for something like three or four months at a downtown theatre. Today, *Anne Trister*, which isn't even the blockbuster *Le Déclin de l'empire américain* turned out to be, played at several theatres and ran for more than eight months at one of them.

**Jean-Claude Lauzon:** Yeah. Well, I think people had enough of Beaver stories, I think we were too enclosed. If you look at the face of our politicians right now, the Canadian people are so...

We are not too extravagant. We are too Nordic. We have to explode on the level of creativity. We have to explode much more than that to interest people.

**Cinema Canada:** You did a workshop at The American Film Institute. And you have a degree in film from the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM). Did you see a difference in how you were taught and what you learned?

**Jean-Claude Lauzon:** People at UQAM spent too much time asking what you wanted to say and very little time explaining what a crew is, what a technical cut is, how to plan a shoot. I would have preferred that they teach me the medium rather than drag me through purgatory to see if the things I had to say were correct.

I profited enormously from University. I think it was an extraordinary time in my life both for the people I met there and for a few professors who really influenced me, like Pierre Bour-gault who brought me further in my personal life. But as regards the technique I learned absolutely nothing.

But I don't want to shit on everybody, you know. Working with the National Film Board was great. When I decided to learn how to make films, I shut myself in the NFB with a chronometer, a copybook and a drawing table and I looked at films. And I passed days there, weeks. I saw films, five times. I took notes, listened, looked...

The big difference for me between Los Angeles and UQAM was that I learn-

ed more about script-writing and directing actors in two months in L.A. than I did here in three years. If I had had the chance to study at a better school I would have been much better, much quicker. But my experience also gave me another kind of energy. It gave me a kind of aggressivity.

Making films takes an incredible amount of energy. You have to have energy for more than a nice technical cut and directing actors. You have to be creative and have incredible amounts of energy and if you can have only one of the two, it's better to have the energy. Because if you're just creative, you won't make films. The proof is that there are people who have no creativity who are making a lot of films in Canada. You have to be crazy to make films.

I think students in university are more interested in the glamour and the interviews than by the reality of what it is to make a film. Making a film is fucking hard. And when the film is finished in Canada you have to start from scratch all over again. You have to fight like a goddamn dog. If you can't crash through a bay window on the thirtieth floor without worrying about how you're going to land – forget it. Sell stamps. Because making a film is completely crazy.

I won the first Canadian student film prize. Then *Piwi* won an international prize at the World Film Festival. If I were a boxer in Canada, if I were a hockey player, I would have received

• Lauzon on the set of *Un Zoo, la Nuit* with DOP Guy Dufaux and Nathalie Moliavko Visotzky



500 times more encouragement. Once I finished *Piwi*, Radio-Québec (who funded it) gave me a party. Then they closed the door and said hello and goodbye. People don't give a damn. Everytime you make a film you have to fight like a gooddamn dog.

People who have three cappucinos, and talk about making films and have meetings to make films, will never make movies because they don't have the fucking drive. (Yves) Simoneau is like a train going 100,000 miles an hour who's going to run over anything that gets in his way. If you're on roller-skates, do not make films.

**Cinema Canada:** *It seems to me that your fight against this machinery that is now the film industry in Québec – the different organizations that are now the establishment that hands out money for film – is really something that is beginning with your generation as well. This kind of establishment didn't really exist before.*

**Jean-Claude Lauzon:** I do find that it's funny. I was really aggressive before. But when you get to be 33 years old and you say? "cut" for the last time after one year's preparation and your film's done and you did spend \$1.9 million to get

your nightmares *bibbites* on the screen, I do understand. It's fantastic to be a French Canadian. Fantastic. Really. There is no place in the world where you can get the support, where you can get that much money to make a first feature film. It's fantastic.

If our cinematic culture is as bad as it is today, it is not the fault of the *auteurs*. It is the fault of the producers and how they choose projects. When you start to think about how you are when you are 29 years old and you have completely different references. You write stories and you speak with these people who go to bed at 9:30 and never go to films. How do you speak to them? My God!

But you know, I've told myself, I don't want to put any more energy into talking about politics. When I'm alone I'm thinking "be careful." Not because I'm scared but because I don't want to become a soldier and fight against that. I'm an artist and I want to stay this way and if the system is like that, I will have to find a way to pass through it. I don't want to change politics. I don't want to write two lines about it. I don't care. You know, you can tell them, "Don't call me for interviews about how we make films in Canada." I don't fucking care. I want to make my next film. And if I have to sell balloons at the Forum to

do it, I will sell balloons. I want to become immune to this kind of politics. I want to say what I have to say via my characters and not via a stand-up routine.

**Cinema Canada:** *The characters in Un Zoo seem based on you and your father. Is the film kind of an extrapolated autobiography?*

**Jean-Claude Lauzon:** Kind of, yes. Albert is a character out of Marc-André Forcier, a character out of Gilles Carle, whereas Poignard and the other guys want to go away to make a film like *Subway*. You know, I do love the deepness of the characters of *Les Bons débarras*. I don't want to be like some Canadian directors who just want to be little Americans. I am from a specific culture and I am really proud to be a French Canadian.

*Un Zoo*, is so close to me, so close, close, to me. I was living late in the evening, writing scripts, making films, having fun. A really special life you know. At the same time you're looking at your poor father who's dying in a poor place and you say, "I did have a chance to go to university, somebody gave me a chance, and now I'm in a totally different culture from him, totally different." My father had a second-grade education and I could never speak to

him. And when I saw him dying in bed for the first time, I was in shock. I said to myself, "Even if I'm writing by myself at four o'clock in the morning and fucking everything that can be fucked and believe that I am God, I am not that different from him." When you are young, you spit in people's faces because you believe that you can reinvent the world. You do believe that and I do believe you need to. But then you get to the point where you look over your shoulder and you see somebody who has your eyes and your nose and whom you never listened to. And it's not just because he's related to you that you say, "Oh, poor Dad." You know, maybe life is just a bit of sperm passing from someone to someone else to someone else. That's it.

**Cinema Canada:** *But you as a creative person you do reinvent the world. At least within the framework of your movies.*

**Jean-Claude Lauzon:** I wrote something for Cannes, they needed an article, and I said I'm a nostalgic person. I do make films because I can enjoy the time I am in it – I do in my films what I didn't have the guts to do in life. I start telling lies about the true story that I live.



## La loge officielle des artistes

Dans les coulisses de l'Hôtel du Parc, c'est tout le monde des arts du spectacle, de la scène et de la musique jazzée qui se croise et se rencontre, au détour d'un repas génial ou d'une soirée insolite.

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**COMPETITION (Short Films)**

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**L'HOMME  
QUI PLANTAIT DES  
ARBRES**

*by Frédéric Back*

**Produced by: La Société Radio-Canada**

**Contact in Cannes:**

*Denise Prézeau  
Hôtel Majestic  
93.68.91.00*

**DIRECTORS' FORTNIGHT**

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**UN ZOO  
LA NUIT**

*by Jean-Claude Lauzon*

**Produced by: Les Productions OZ Inc.  
(Roger Frappier, Pierre Gendron)**

**International Sales: CINENOVE Inc.**

**Contact in Cannes:**

*André Lafond, Roger Frappier, Pierre Gendron  
Palais des Festivals, Stand 11.04/13.03*

**I'VE HEARD  
THE MERMAIDS  
SINGING**

*by Patricia Rozema*

**Produced by: VOS Productions Inc.  
(Patricia Rozema, Alexandra Raffé)**

**International Sales: Films Transit Inc.**

**Contact in Cannes:**

*Jan Rofekamp, Catherine Le Clef  
Palais des Festivals, Stand 11.04/13.03*

**CANNES JUNIOR**

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**HENRI**

MOI, MON PÈRE, MA VIE...

*by François Labonté*

**Produced by: Les Films Vision 4 Inc.  
(Claude Bonin)**

**International Sales: Films Transit Inc.**

**Contact in Cannes:**

*Jan Rofekamp, Catherine Le Clef  
Palais des Festivals, Stand 11.04/13.03*

**SHELLEY**

*by Christian Bruyère*

**Produced by: Face to Face Films Ltd.**

**International Sales: Films Transit Inc.**

**Contact in Cannes:**

*Jan Rofekamp, Catherine Le Clef  
Palais des Festivals, Stand 11.04/13.03*